



Haiti

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

International Religious Freedom Report 2009

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The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country, which shares the Caribbean island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic, has an area of 10,714 square miles and a population of 9 million.

A U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) census released in 2006 (based on 2003 data) lists the following religious demographics: 54.7 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 15.4 percent Baptist, 7.9 percent Pentecostal, and 3 percent Seventh-day Adventist. Episcopalians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Muslims, and practitioners of Vodou (voodoo) are also present. An undetermined percentage of the population practices both Vodou and Christianity. Recent estimates indicate that half of the population practices Vodou, most along with other religious practices. The UNFPA reported 2.1 percent of the population practices Vodou as their primary religion.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion, provided that these practices do not disturb law and order.

The Constitution directs the establishment of laws to regulate the recognition and operation of religious groups. The administration and monitoring of religious affairs falls under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship. The Bureau of Religious Affairs within the Ministry is responsible for registering churches, clergy, and missionaries.

The Government observes Good Friday, Corpus Christi, the Feast of the Assumption, All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day, and Christmas as national holidays.

Recognition by the Bureau of Religious Affairs affords religious groups standing in legal disputes, protects their tax-

exempt status, and extends civil recognition to documents such as marriage and baptismal certificates. Goods imported for use by registered religious groups and missionaries are exempt from customs duties, and registered churches are not taxed. Requirements for registration with the Bureau include information on qualifications of the group's leader, a membership list, and a list of the group's social projects. Registered religious groups must submit an annual report of their activities to the Bureau. Most Catholic and Protestant organizations were registered. Although legally permitted to register, many nondenominational Christian groups and Vodou practitioners operated informally and did not seek official recognition. There were no reports of this requirement restricting the operation of a religious group.

Historically, Roman Catholicism was the official religion. While this official status ended with the enactment of the 1987 Constitution, neither the Government nor the Holy See renounced the 1860 concordat, which serves as the basis for relations between the Catholic Church (and its religious orders) and the state. In many respects, Catholicism retains its traditional primacy among the country's religious groups. Official and quasi-official functions are held in Catholic churches and cathedrals, such as "Te Deum" masses for Independence Day, Flag Day, and Founders Day; however, the Government recognizes the increasing role of Protestant churches. For example, Episcopal and other Protestant clergy were invited to participate when the religious sector was asked to play an advisory role in politics.

Organized missionary groups and missionaries affiliated with independent churches operated hospitals, orphanages, schools, and clinics. Foreign missionaries enter as regular tourists and submit paperwork similar to that submitted by domestic religious groups to the Bureau of Religious Affairs. Delays in issuing residence permits were attributed to bureaucratic delay.

The Constitution stipulates that persons cannot be required to join an organization or receive religious instruction contrary to their convictions. In most Catholic or Protestant schools, school authorities require religious education but generally make provisions for students who are not affiliated with that school's denomination.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Religion plays a prominent role in society, and citizens freely expressed their religious beliefs. Ecumenical organizations were active. Interfaith cooperation was perhaps most effective in the National Federation of Private Schools. While society generally was tolerant of the variety of religious practices, Christian attitudes toward Vodou ranged from acceptance as part of the culture to rejection as incompatible with Christianity. These differing perspectives led to isolated instances of conflict.

Some religious groups were politically active. One Protestant pastor led the Christian Movement for a New Haiti political party, and another led the National Union of Christians for the Renovation of Haiti political party. The Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Protestant Federation occasionally issued statements on political matters. On December 5, 2008, the National Confederation of Haitian Vodou held a peaceful political rally without interference.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy representatives routinely met with religious and civil society leaders to seek their views, including on religious freedom.